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HOUSE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE
ON MIDDLE EAST AND CENTRAL ASIA AND
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS

STATEMENT OF

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BEFORE THE HOUSE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE

ON MIDDLE EAST AND CENTRAL ASIA AND SUBCOMMITTEE

ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS

ON AFGHANISTAN: PROGRESS REPORT

9 MARCH 2006

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Chairwoman Ros-Lehtinen, Congressman Ackerman, Chairman Rohrabacher, Congressman Delahunt and members of the Committees:

There are approximately 20,000 U.S. and 4,500 Coalition forces from nineteen nations deployed in Afghanistan as part of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). These forces are commanded by Combined Forces Command - Afghanistan (CFC-A), headquartered in Kabul, which assures unity of effort with the U.S. Ambassador in Kabul and the NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), also headquartered in Kabul. NATO's ISAF contributes approximately 8,500 troops from twenty-one nations, over 150 of whom are American. ISAF troops are stationed in Kabul to provide security, conduct security and stability operations in northern and western Afghanistan, and are deploying to southern Afghanistan to take over from US OEF forces.

My testimony today will focus upon the overall security situation in Afghanistan, and the issues and regions of concern; an assessment of the continued threat of Taliban forces and options to deal with them; an overview of increased NATO and individual nation participation in operations in Afghanistan and; a discussion of the integrated approach incorporating political and economic components in achieving long-term security goals.

We have made significant progress in Afghanistan and we must continue to work to promote stability and thwart any burgeoning insurgency. Consistent with CENTCOM's primary goal of defeating al Qaida and its allies, CFC-A maintains an intense focus on any indications that al Qaida is attempting to reestablish a safe haven in Afghanistan. Al Qaida senior leaders operate in Pakistan's rugged and isolated Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) that borders eastern Afghanistan. In addition to al Qaida, three insurgent groups - all with al Qaida links - constitute the main enemy threat in Afghanistan:

(1) the Taliban, (2) Haqqani Tribal Network, and (3) Hezb-i-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG).

The Taliban are the largest and most active group, operating primarily in the southern and eastern provinces and Kabul. Its core supporters, almost entirely Pashtun, seek its return to power. The Taliban has demonstrated resilience after defeats. They appeared tactically stronger on the battlefield this year and they demonstrate an increased willingness to use suicide bomber and IED tactics. While the Taliban remain very unpopular in most parts of the country, pockets of hard core support remain. Taliban activities remain clearly linked to al Qaida funding, direction, and ideological thinking. The Taliban do not have the capability to exercise control over large areas of Afghanistan, but they are disruptive to reconstruction and reconciliation efforts. It is increasingly clear that Taliban leaders also use Pakistan's FATA to organize, plan and rest. Pakistani efforts to deny this safe haven, while considerable, have yet to shut down this area to Taliban and al Qaida use.

The Haqqani Tribal Network, which has ties to the Taliban, operates primarily in eastern Afghanistan and the FATA region of Pakistan. Haqqani goals are limited primarily to obtaining autonomy in eastern Afghanistan and the FATA region. Although the most tactically proficient of the enemy we face in Afghanistan, they present a limited strategic threat.

The HIG, while remaining dangerous, similarly presents only a limited strategic threat. It operates primarily in eastern Afghanistan and is heavily involved in illicit activities such as narcotics and smuggling, resembling more of a Mafia-like organization than an insurgent movement with national goals. Nevertheless, given its historical links with al Qaida, it can help facilitate al Qaida operations in Kabul and eastern

Afghanistan if it finds that doing so enhances its interests. Some HIG operatives may be considering political reconciliation.

Keeping our eyes on the target of making al Qaida irrelevant and preventing a return of the Taliban in Afghanistan, CFC-A will continue to focus on: killing and capturing terrorists and neutralizing the insurgency; providing the shield behind which economic and political progress can move forward and legitimate government institutions can form and take root; and training and building capable Afghan security forces. Our goal, which we share with the people of Afghanistan, is a country at peace with its neighbors and an ally in the broader war against terror, with a representative government and security forces sufficient to maintain domestic order and deny Afghanistan as a safe haven for terrorists.

During the past year, CFC-A continued aggressive offensive military operations to kill and capture terrorists and insurgents and shut down the sanctuaries in which they operate. These efforts take time, rarely producing major breakthroughs, but incremental progress in this important area continues. U.S. and Coalition forces dominate the battle space and are increasingly involving Afghan National Army units in military operations.

Training, building, and mentoring the Afghan National Army (ANA) remains a central pillar of our strategy to stabilize Afghanistan. Given the state of the ANA, our focus has been on quality - building from the ground up - not on quantity. There has been steady progress. The Afghan Army now numbers over 26,000 trained and equipped troops. Most important in terms of progress, the citizens of Afghanistan are beginning to view the ANA as a truly national institution that is both trusted and respected.

Although the development of an effective Afghan National Army is proceeding on schedule, the Afghan National Police (ANP) force requires considerable work. In conjunction with our coalition partners, building a professional and competent ANP remains a top CFC-A priority. Over 59,000 police have been trained. Ultimately, police provide the security backbone against any insurgency and criminal activity. Afghanistan is intensely tribal and lacks modern infrastructure. Loyal and competent police are essential to spreading the rule of law and good governance. A long, hard road is ahead to make Afghan police what the nation needs.

2006 is a pivotal year as NATO expands the mission of ISAF to include the total land area of Afghanistan. Stage III of the ISAF transition is scheduled for the late spring or summer of 2006 when Regional Command South (RC South) transfers to NATO command. CENTCOM continues to work closely with NATO to enable its command and control structures and ensure a successful NATO transition in Afghanistan.

Having NATO, an organization consisting of 26 of the world's most powerful countries, committed to Afghanistan's future is good for Afghanistan. NATO-ISAF is already a major contributor to Afghanistan's security. Deepening international commitment to Afghanistan's future will do much to assist the emerging Afghan government and diminish al Qaida's attractiveness to people in Central and South Asia.

The political and economic situation in Afghanistan is improving, but opium production and the resultant trafficking of opium and its derivative still accounts for roughly one third of Afghanistan's total GDP. Afghanistan's huge drug trade severely impacts efforts to rebuild the economy, develop a strong democratic government based upon rule of law and threatens regional stability. Dangerous security conditions and

corruption constrain government and international efforts to combat the drug trade.

The Government of Afghanistan continues to pursue an eight pillar counter narcotics strategy focused on: public information, alternative livelihoods, law enforcement, criminal justice, eradication, institutional development, regional cooperation and demand reduction. The international community actively assists the Government of Afghanistan in its counter narcotics efforts and to help build its capacity. International counter narcotics activities remain under a multilateral mandate with the UK, Government of Afghanistan, and the United States. US government assistance focuses on the five pillars of Alternative Livelihoods, Public Information, Criminal Justice, Law Enforcement, and Eradication in close coordination with the Government of Afghanistan. Although 2005 saw some encouraging developments, the Government of Afghanistan will need sustained international assistance and political support over many years to achieve its counter narcotics goals.

Success in Afghanistan not only requires military prowess, it also requires economic revival and reconstruction of key infrastructure. The center of gravity of CFC-A's campaign is decreasingly military and increasingly in the domain of governance and economic development. American, Coalition and Afghan forces are continuing to provide the critical shield behind which progress in the political and economic realms can continue.

Reconstruction remains a critical way to isolate our enemies, depriving them of their support base, and giving Afghans hope for a better future. Continuing and sustained development efforts will be critical to overall success. The United States and our allies will continue to work with the Afghan government in assisting Afghanistan in

building the infrastructure needed for a functioning economy. The London Conference in January 2006 was an important step in this regard. More than \$10 Billion has been pledged for Afghanistan from the international community for the next 5 years. This financial support is a critical aspect of reconstruction. Continued international and political support will be needed.

Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), small civil-military affairs teams with civilian and interagency expertise, remain an important tool in the reconstruction effort. This past year, CFC-A and its NATO-ISAF partners increased the number of PRTs to 23. Of these, 14 are directed by CFC-A, and nine others operate under the authority of NATO-ISAF. Over time, Afghan PRTs will transform from military to civilian-led organizations, and ultimately become provincial development authorities of the Afghan government.

Since September 2001, progress in Afghanistan has been remarkable: the al-Qaida safe haven in Afghanistan was eliminated and the Taliban removed from power; security was established for a political process in which the people of the country have freely elected a president and parliament; military units spear-headed an effort to bring the significant resources and expertise of the international community to help Afghanistan begin to address many of its longstanding problems; and the United States, along with our international partners and the Afghan government and people, has begun the difficult work of helping Afghans build the institutions and infrastructure that are the key to the future of their country.

Given this progress, there is still a very strong notion of "consent" in this country - the Afghan people are very appreciative of the help they have received from international troops, especially those from the United States, and there is a strong, broad-based desire for

such troops to remain in the country. But much work needs to be done and progress is not guaranteed. Helping Afghans build infrastructure, which in many regions is nonexistent, attack endemic corruption, address narco-trafficking, train their Army and police, all while fighting an insurgency that remains patient, hidden, and dangerous, are tasks that will require years. As in Iraq, an essential element of achieving overall success will depend on the leadership, character, and vision of Afghanistan's elected leaders.

I will now be happy to answer your questions.